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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2323

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4838

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2614

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2479

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 3082

RHMFIS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000230

SIPDIS

SCA/CEN; EEB

PLEASE PASS TO USTDA DAN STEIN

ENERGY FOR EKIMOFF/THOMPSON

COMMERCE FOR HUEPER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/17/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EINV](#) [ENRG](#) [UN](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: BRANCH OF RUSSIAN OIL AND GAS

UNIVERSITY DEVELOPING, BUT SLOWLY

Classified By: Charge Richard Miles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ashgabat branch of the Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas has been operational for almost six months, but little is known about how it is functioning. Its continued development into a legitimate educational institution that will serve the needs of the energy sector is being fostered by the Russian Government and boasts some 90 students now. However, the branch still has a ways to go before it will be able to compete with limited opportunities to study at Russian institutions. The Turkmen need to control the branch,s development and concerns about the branch as a tool of Russian influence could present some additional challenges. END SUMMARY.

RUSSIANS VOLUNTEER HELP WITH ENERGY SECTOR EDUCATION

12. (U) During their July 2008 meeting, Presidents Medvedev and Berdimuhamedov discussed areas of cooperation in the energy sector, and ultimately signed a protocol that initiated the effort to open a branch of the Gubkin Russian State Oil and Gas University in Ashgabat, according to Russian press. By late August 2008 Berdimuhamedov officially ordered the branch to be opened and gave the Ministry of Education responsibility for assisting and monitoring it. Deputy Chairman for Education Saparliyev and Deputy Chairman for Oil and Gas Tagiyev were instructed to &personally8 oversee its operations and activity. A new building to house the university branch is reportedly planned within the next two years. Turkmen press hinted in December 2008 that the Russian energy company Itera might pay for its construction. In the meantime, the branch is occupying a building belonging to the Turkmen Polytechnic Institute. The branch,s classrooms there have reportedly been equipped with &state of the art8 classroom facilities.

13. (C) Russian First Deputy Prime Minister, Viktor Zubkov, was the honored guest at an opening ceremony for the branch in late August 2008, where it was announced that Professor

V.I. Danischev (presumably a professor from Gubkin) had been appointed the branch,s director. The press reported that the branch would initially provide basic curriculum on oil and gas field operations, well drilling, oil and gas production and machinery. Press reports suggested that Berdimuhamedov and Zubkov discussed the issue of staff development for the branch, but no details have emerged regarding whether Russians or Turkmen would be on the teaching staff. A local contact with friends in the teaching community opined that this might be a significant issue. She commented that although the Turkmen Government probably wants Turkmen professors to staff the branch, there are probably very few academically-qualified Turkmen available whom the Government would approve for the positions. She said it could be a double-edged sword, because few academically-qualified Russian professors would be willing to live and work in Turkmenistan.

&THE FIRST PANCAKE IS A LUMP8

¶4. (C) Having opened for its first academic year in September 2008, the branch reportedly enrolled 90 Turkmen students. Available information, however, suggests that the branch may currently have a very limited capacity right now to provide students with a full university level program of study. Local press noted that 75 of the original 90 would be admitted to core curriculum courses that would be available at a later time. A local Post contact, who knows a Turkmen instructor there, said that expectations for the first group of students were low. She opined that the students who were selected for enrollment did not have impressive academic

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records, and their overall Russian language skills were so poor that the instructors were uncertain that they could comprehend the curriculum.

¶5. (U) The Turkmen Government is paying for all of the students who are currently enrolled at the branch, according to Turkmen press. On February 3, a delegation from the Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas was in Ashgabat, and the university,s Rector, V.G. Martinov, reportedly offered Turkmen officials the services of his university in training Turkmen staff. He also promised that the university would help stock the branch,s library.

TURKMEN GOVERNMENT SENDING MORE STUDENTS TO RUSSIA

¶6. (U) Even as the branch opened its doors in the fall of 2008, Turkmen press noted that 250 Turkmen government-approved students were sent to Russian university and institutes, 180 more than were sent in 2007. The Russian Government is reportedly financing the studies of 100 of them, and the remaining 150 are being financed by unspecified &organizations and entities in Turkmenistan,8 probably including companies that do business here. Turkmen Government-approved students are now reportedly pursuing energy sector specialties at 35 universities and institutes in Russia, including Gubkin, Tyumen Oil and Gas University, Ufa State University for Petro-technology, Kazan State Technical University, Moscow State Technical University, Moscow State Mining University and Volgograd Technical University.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Few would question the need for the Gubkin branch to open in Turkmenistan and help build up human capacity and sector expertise in government agencies and out in the field. The Turkmen need to maintain control over the institution and manage the level of Russian influence it brings, however, could retard the branch,s eventual development into a legitimate, academically rigorous establishment. END COMMENT.

MILES